

"Do you think that there has been anybody up here before with a wooden leg? This leg of mine, which cost me 2,000 kroner, why, it's the best leg I've ever had, far better than the one I lost, because it won't ever be affected with gangrene and it can easily stand a Remington bullet."

And with a beaming face both he and Oskar told me that



now they were going to spend another winter in Spitsbergen, and this time they were to be given their equipment by the fur dealer Claus Andersen. It was a well-known fact that people traveling for Andersen were equipped in such a way that, even if the trip should last two years, there was nothing to be feared.

## THE THREE SAPPERS

### A TRUE STORY

By KARL SPRINGENSCHMID

*The second of the two short stories published in this double issue has just reached us from Germany. Although it has the German-Soviet front for its background, it is not a war story in the ordinary sense of the word. An example of the broad humor of the front, it shows one of the other sides of war.*

*As regards the author, we know nothing about him except that, like the three sappers he describes, he is one among millions of German men fighting on the Eastern Front.—K. M.*

**T**HOSE had been hard days in the forests around Lake Ilmen. For three weeks the regiment had been in battle. But now another division was at the front, and the regiment was going to the rear for a spell of rest.

The clouds hung low over the forests. Rain was pouring down. After the long, tedious march, the men were dead tired. Sapper Hotter, "Mine" Hotter, slept as he stood leaning against a tree, while the other two men were putting up the tent. Hotter could sleep in peace, for there were no more mines around here. In his company it was said that he could "smell" the mines. His nose was long enough, all right. But where nobody else saw or even suspected anything, he would suddenly pull back the others, creep forward, and dig out the nicest mines, as if he had buried them there himself. It was not only his nose, it was also his fingers. He had fingers, they said, as sensitive and skillful as those of a midwife. No one would have

credited that coarse lumberman with such a fine touch; what he needed for the mines he had probably learned at home with the girls.

Lance Corporal Knapp was more for rough things. Blasting was what he liked. It wasn't a real war for him unless there was something he could blow up: bridges, pillboxes, houses, trees, barbed-wire entanglements, fish out of the water, stones out of the ground. "Blow it up!" was his slogan. At the moment, however, he was kneeling on the floor of the forest like any ordinary soldier and was pulling his end of the canvas so tight that the third man, Federspiel, was almost dragged over the tent post.

"What's the hurry?" yelled stout little Federspiel, trying hard to keep his balance and stretch the canvas on his own side. In contrast to the other two, Federspiel was an all-round sapper, always there, always useful. He liked a well-built tent. So he finished up by digging a small

trench around the tent and carefully placing pieces of turf on the lower edge of the canvas. "Hey, Hotter," Knapp then called out, dragging him away from his tree, "the hotel is ready—the 'Green Sapper,' with central heating provided by ourselves and with running water in every room if it keeps on raining like this!"

Without waking up properly, Hotter staggered into the tent, and drew up his legs a bit. Now the three of them lay down in that ingenious jigsaw figure that had been tested in many a long tent night. Federspiel crawled to the back of the tent in such a way that Knapp could place his broad back in front of him while Hotter wound his long shape around Knapp's back. Chest and ribs of the one were already so adjusted to the back and seat of the other that the third had no trouble at all in tucking away his arms and legs. It looked as if that which was lying in the tent were a single creature, so perfectly did each part fit into the other.

The rain drummed down on the tent and provided the right music. As they lay down, they fell asleep. Hotter immediately began his nightly routine of sawing wood. His profound bass snore had become part of the sappers' sleep.

Suddenly a heavy hand shook the side of the tent, and a voice rang out, an unmistakable voice, the voice of the sergeant: "Hey, you fellows, you'll have to dig the garbage hole!"

All three of them had heard. A sapper's sleep is deep, deeper than the deepest blast hole, and even if thunder and lightning, bombs and shells, the whole of the heavenly and terrestrial artillery go off beside him, the sapper sleeps his sleep; for, after all, the shooting is none of his business. But if anything happens that concerns him, no matter how secret and quiet it is, just someone whistling for grub time, or the captain saying something, or the sergeant shouting something, the sapper is awake immediately and listens.

So it happened that all three of them heard their orders quite well. Of course,

the company needed a proper garbage hole here in the forest.

"Did you hear, Knapp?" Federspiel said, shaking his neighbor. "We are to dig the garbage hole!"

"Sure," mumbled Knapp, almost asleep again, and did not move.

Only after a long pause did he suddenly sit up, as if he had only just become aware of what was required. He firmly grasped the third man's shoulder.

"Hey, Hotter, didn't you hear? We have to dig the garbage hole."

"The garbage hole," mumbled Hotter between snores, without waking up.

Not until some time later did he suddenly pull himself together. He opened his eyes, reached across Knapp for Federspiel, got him by the hair and said hollowly:

"Federspiel, hey, what about the garbage hole?"

But Federspiel was already dead to the world, and so was Knapp.

The rain came down incessantly. Outside, on the highway, tanks rumbled, assault guns roared past, infantry sang as it marched, and the war went on. Only in the little tent the sappers slept as if their sleep were to last to the end of all time.

But suddenly little Federspiel started up. He did not know how or why, but he was suddenly awake and said with a loud, clear voice to himself: "The garbage hole."

He turned his head around and looked at the two others, Hotter with his angular limbs and Knapp filling half the tent, as they lay there, sleeping and snoring, so that the tent seemed to contract and expand with every breath.

Good old Federspiel was seized with pity at this sight. "After all, the poor devils," he said pensively, "sleep is the finest thing a sapper can have." And with that he raised himself, carefully lifted his left foot, thrust it across Knapp, put it down somewhere between Hotter's limbs, got up, and crawled out into the open.

All around him in the green forest were snoring tents. Federspiel took rake, ax, and spade, and walked around the sleeping company toward the edge of the forest. There he began to dig the hole, six feet long, four feet deep, and three feet wide; just as it should be.

Then he crawled back over the two men in the tent and lay down again in his place. "Nothing like sleeping," he said to himself, "after one's done one's job properly." So he laid his head into the crook of his arm again and slipped over into that other world where there is no barbed wire, no mines, and no concentrated blasting charges.

Suddenly Hotter sat up and looked around. There was something that wouldn't let him sleep. He pondered for a while and groped his way along the previous day. But everything he found there was in order. He had collected and exploded all seven of the mines and had marked the cleared mine field in the captain's map. Then they had marched and marched and had finally arrived in this forest, where orders had come that the company could rest and put up tents. Then he had lain down, and then—now he had it!

"The garbage hole, my God, the garbage hole!"

The three of them could have done the job in no time. But when he looked at the other two, Federspiel in the corner and huge Knapp beside him, as they were lying there sleeping like angels, he was seized with pity. "Poor devils," he thought, and got up. He took spade, ax, and rake, went to the river, and dug the hole, six feet long, four feet deep, three feet wide.

Then he crawled back to his place, lay down around the others, and hurried to catch up with them, for in sleeping they were very fast.

So far, all was clear; for the cause that woke up the third man, Knapp, was not the conscience of a good sapper but plain hunger. When he grasped what had woken him up, he remembered the garbage hole. He looked at the other two and mumbled: "You poor devils, you. So the company hasn't got its garbage hole yet."

For a while, he sat thinking and shook his head vehemently. But then, when he could find no peace, he crawled out of the tent, walked through the forest and, in the alder thicket some distance away from the company, dug the hole.

On the following morning, when after long hours of sleep the call for grub came—the one call that brought all the men in the tents onto their feet like one man—something happened that the seventh company had not seen during the whole of the war: the sergeant stood there beaming like the morning sun.

When the three sappers arrived, first little Federspiel with his shock of blond hair, behind him Knapp, broad enough for three, and followed by lanky Hotter, they had all three to face the sergeant. "I ordered one garbage hole," he said with a chuckle, "and you have dug three. That's plenty!"

The soldiers all around roared with laughter. But the three sappers did not yet quite understand what the sergeant meant.

"You?" Federspiel asked Knapp.

"Yes, me!" said Knapp.

"And me too!" said Hotter.

